FOREIGN SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

27

SECURITY: CONFIDENTIAL

PRIORITY: AIR PRIORITY

For Dept. use only. REC'D DEC 27

TO: Department of State

755.00/12-1550
XR 655.00

FROM: BRUSSELS 698 December 15, 1950

REF: Embtel 911 Dec 7, 6 p.m.

ACTION: EUR

INFO: DCR OLI

SUBJECT: BELGIAN INTERNAL POLITICS: VIEWS OF MR. SPAAK, FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF BELGIUM.

In a conversation with Mr. Spaak, the undersigned referred tjk to the vote on the Foreign Affairs budget and asked whether it would not have been possible for the Socialists to make a concession and vote with the Government in view of the grave international situation. Mr. Spaak replied that this was quite impossible owing to the Socialists' lack of confidence in the present government, particularly Mr. Van Zeeland. It had been difficult enough to persuade the Socialist parliamentary group to agree to abstain and the vote on this was very close: 20 in favor of abstention, 17 against. Mr. Van Zeeland, he said, professed to want national support on certain policies such as that on Foreign Affairs, yet he had not taken the trouble to explain his policy to the Socialists; for example, Van Zeeland had not talked to him (Spaak) on the subject during the past 8 months. Spaak said he could keep himself informed by his talks in Strasbourg with Schuman, Bech and others whom he had known for many years and what he could pick up here and there or deduce, but this was no way to achieve a bipartisan foreign policy. Another difficulty, Spaak said, was that the Government continued to press such contentious subjects as the school question. Asked whether there was any likelihood of a coalition Government, Spaak said that he could see none at present. In reply to the question whether some of the PSC would not prefer a coalition government, Spaak said that, for example, Van Cauwelaert, President of the Chamber, wants a coalition, but the PSC as a party, could not afford to admit that they were unable to govern with their majority. The majority was just sufficient to make a coalition unnecessary but not enough to represent a majority of opinion in the country. Asked what he thought would be the result if a new election were held, Spaak said there was not the slightest doubt that the PSC would lose its small majority; probably ten seats would be lost in Flanders alone owing to the Royal Question.

755.00/12-1550

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY J.L. SMITH DATE NOV 1 8 1982
CRDS or XGDS EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☒
DECLASSIFIED ☑ RELEASABLE ☑
RELEASE DENIED ☐
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

DEC 29 1950

For the Ambassador,
Hugh Millard
Counselor of Embassy

HM:mjk

CONFIDENTIAL

ACTION COPY — DEPARTMENT OF STATE

The action office must return this permanent record copy to DC/R files with an endorsement of action taken.

CONFIDENTIAL

133
(OVER)

December 16, 1950

TO: Mr. Barnes - S/S

FROM: Mr. Scott - WE

SUBJECT: Belgian political situation

9-8-62

On June 4, 1950 for the third time within a year the Belgians went to the polls to vote on the royal issue. As a result of this vote, the Catholic Party (Social Christian Party), the only party in Belgium dedicated to the return of Leopold III, received a slight majority in both the Senate and the Chamber of the Belgian Parliament, and on June 8, 1950 formed a single party government.

The Socialists and the Liberals, joined to their dismay by the Communists, immediately began demonstrating against the return of the King. On July 20, however, a joint session of Parliament voted 198 to 0 to restore Leopold. Before the roll call on this vote the Socialists, the Communists, and all of the Liberals save one, marched out of the hall.

On July 22, Leopold III returned to Brussels under extraordinary security precautions and on the same day broadcast to the nation, appealing for concord and union. Following the broadcast, he called a meeting of the Crown Council at the palace. Members of the Socialist and Liberal parties refused to attend. There followed a period of strikes, and thousands of small acts of sabotage were committed. The strikes grew in intensity until some 500,000 workers, principally in the southern area of Belgium, the Walloon sector, were out of work. The situation came to a head on July 30 during a manifestation in a small mining town near Liege at which the police were forced to fire into a crowd. Three people were killed. The Socialists immediately called for a march on Brussels and there was every indication that there would be serious trouble, possibly even a split of Belgium.

On August 1, Leopold authorized the issuance of an announcement that he would transfer his powers to his eldest son, Prince Baudouin, and would formally abdicate when the Prince reached his 21st birthday, September 7, 1951. The announcement came too late to call off the march on Brussels, but the Socialists succeeded in turning it into a peaceful demonstration. There was no violence in spite of Communist attempts to create disorder.

Baudouin formally assumed his royal powers on August 11. Since that date, conditions in Belgium insofar as the royal issue is concerned have gradually returned to normal. The Catholic Party, led by M. Pholien, the present Premier, and M. Van Zeeland, Minister for Foreign Affairs, remains in power. The Socialists, under the leadership of Paul-Henri Spaak and Victor Larock, maintain the major opposition to the Government in Parliament.

DC/R

Central Files

755.00/12-1650

755.00/12-1650 CS/H

Confidential File

1952

110418

CONFIDENTIAL